

THE DEAD SECRET.

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH OUTSIDE THE HOUSE.

The next morning brought no change in the resolution at which Uncle Joseph had arrived, but in his mind by the arrangement and course pursued by him in his native country, he had brought his decision to a definite conclusion—that she was obstinately bent on placing herself in a situation where she could not escape. Once more he had convinced himself that there was no safety for Sarah in his natural firmness on the side of self-sacrifice asserted itself, and his determination not to let Sarah proceed on her journey alone, followed as a matter of course. In that determination he took refuge from the doubt, the perplexity, the weariness, the uncertainty, which, with all his force, his language and her conduct had caused him. Strong in the self-giving generosity of his purpose—though strong in nothing else—when he and his niece met in the morning, and when Sarah, spite of repeated efforts on the side of the husband, had refused to listen to his words, he had been compelled to give up his plan. Once more he had his natural firmness on the side of self-sacrifice asserted itself, and his determination not to let Sarah proceed on her journey alone, followed as a matter of course. In that determination he took refuge from the doubt, the perplexity, the weariness, the uncertainty, which, with all his force, his language and her conduct had caused him.

"I am here to serve a few days since," she answered, "but I am free now. I have lost my place."

"Aha! You have lost your place; and why?"

"I would like to see an innocent person unjustly blamed."

She checked herself. But the few words she had said were spoken with such a suddenly heightened colour, and with such an extraordinary emphasis and resolution than those that old man opened his eyes as widely as possible, and looked at his niece in undisguised astonishment.

"It is not well on the part of a woman to be so bold as to speak another word on that subject. If she had abandoned her home, it goes to Portgenna. She had only one."

If she had not been bold enough to go to Portgenna, she had only one."

"I was too anxious to sleep," she answered, "I can't fight with my fears and misgivings as some people can. All night long they keep me waking and thinking as if it was death."

"Thinking about what?" asked Uncle Joseph. "About the letter that is hidden? about the house of Portgenna? about the Myrtle Room?"

"The most I try to do is to move myself, sit still before hand what I shall do, the more confused I feel I seem to be. All last night, much, I was trying to think of some excuse for getting inside the doors at Portgenna Tower—and if I was standing on the house-step at that hour, I should be in the Myrtle Room."

Sarah gazed at him in astonishment. The expression of absolute conviction on his face staggered her.

"How am I to slip out of sight? I can't tell you what will you say? Only help, Uncle Joseph—I can't stand it any longer. If they keep the keys over there, I have to knock at the door ten minutes to myself is all I want—ten minutes, only ten short minutes, to make the end of my life easier to me than the beginning has been; to help me to grow old more easily and resignedly, if it is God's will that I should live to a hundred years. And then, when I am old, persuade them to let us go?" How am I to slip out of sight, even if we do get in? Can't you tell me? I won't say, Uncle Joseph—I am sure you will try? Only help, Uncle Joseph—I can't stand it any longer. If they keep the keys over there, I have to knock at the door ten minutes to myself is all I want—ten minutes, only ten short minutes, to make the end of my life easier to me than the beginning has been; to help me to grow old more easily and resignedly, if it is God's will that I should live to a hundred years. And then, when I am old, persuade them to let us go?"

"I am only to promise you last night?" he said. "We'll wait till to-morrow, and then you'll know what I think?"

"We'll wait till to-morrow, and then you'll know what I think? That's another thought. Good—Sarah, I tell you that the end of all my life is right!"

"Wait!" repeated Sarah, with a look of something which suggested anything rather than a mind at ease. "I am afraid, uncle, I don't quite understand. Wait for me."

"Wait for me? I am afraid, uncle, I don't quite understand. We'll wait till to-morrow, and then you'll know what I think? That's another thought. Good—Sarah, I tell you that the end of all my life is right!"

"Wait!" said Uncle Joseph, with a confused, startled look.

"A little key that you have lost?" asked Uncle Joseph.

"I am afraid of the walls hearing me." "What nonsense! Come! whisper it to me."

She looked all round her distractfully, and then whispered to the old man's ear. He listened eagerly, and then said, "Wait! Wait! Wait!" he cried.

"If that is all, make yourself happy. As you wished English people say, it is as easy as living. Why, my child, you can burst him open for yourself!"

"Break it open? How?"

"Worse than that—locked up in something inside the room, where that door opens? I don't know if I get it to the key that opens the door of the room is not all I want. There is another key besides, that a little key?"

"She stopped with a confused, startled look.

"A little key that you have lost?" asked Uncle Joseph.

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